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A  
P L E A  
FOR THE  
CATHOLIC CLAIMS;  
A  
SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE CHAPEL IN ESSEX STREET,

MARCH 10, 1813.

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR A

GENERAL FAST.

---

BY THOMAS BELSHAM.

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*NON IGNARA MALI, MISERIS SUCCURRERE DISCO.*

VIRGIL.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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THE Author of the Discourse here offered to the Public, though he earnestly advocates the Catholic Claims, cannot justly be suspected of a desire to pay undue court to the Catholic Body; as, since the decease of his learned and estimable friend, the Reverend Dr. Alexander Geddes, it has not been his good fortune to become acquainted with a single individual of the Catholic persuasion. His sole object is, to bear his public, however feeble testimony, to the grand principle of Universal Religious Liberty. That, in pleading this great cause, his feelings may have been more than usually interested by the consciousness of being himself a member of *the only Christian sect which is now proscribed by pains and penalties*, he will not attempt to dissemble. But he trusts, that his ruling motive is, a pre-eminent regard to Truth and Liberty.

The following Discourse was drawn up for the late Fast day. It was delivered to a much larger congregation on the Sunday following; and a general and earnest wish having been expressed for its publication, it is now respectfully commended to the candid perusal of those, who then honoured it with their approbation.

*Essex House,*  
*March 24, 1813.*

A  
P L E A  
FOR  
THE CATHOLIC CLAIMS.  

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A FAST SERMON.  

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ROM. XIV, 13.—*Let us not, therefore, judge one another any more, but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall, in his brother's way.*

I CANNOT but congratulate the age and country in which we live, upon the rapid progress which the great principles of religious liberty have made in the world, and particularly in this nation, in the course of the last century. A hundred years ago, whatever might be the liberality of a few enlightened individuals, there was hardly any sect or party of Christians which did not hold the principles of persecution; which did not maintain, that certain opinions were so heretical and dangerous to the souls of men, that the profession of them ought not to be tolerated by the civil power, whatever might

be the moral character or the peaceable demeanour of their teachers and abettors. The catholic persecuted the protestant for heresy, while the protestant, loud in his condemnation of intolerance, equally persecuted the catholic for idolatry, and both united in persecuting the anti-trinitarians, as a sect which ought to be exterminated from the earth. This principle of persecution for opinions only, is now generally discarded. And though some fiery bigots may remain in every sect, it is nevertheless probable, that, in this age and country, there is not any one denomination of Christians, protestant or catholic, conformist or nonconformist, which would, as a body, justify the infliction of pains and penalties upon the advocates of any opinions, merely for avowing or teaching those opinions, however unscriptural or dangerous they might be thought.

This great principle of universal religious liberty, and of freedom from all penal restraints upon the profession of any religious principles, and the exercise of a corresponding religious worship, was supported unanimously at a late meeting of one respectable body of Christians\*, and carried, by a triumphant majority, in another†, which bodies were composed of mem-

\* The General Body of dissenting ministers of the three denominations.

† The Body of Deputies of the dissenting congregations



bers as widely differing from each other in theological systems as can easily be conceived. Nevertheless, all parties concurred in an application to the legislature, for the repeal of all laws, inflicting penalties upon a religious account only.

The government of the country itself participates in the same liberal and truly catholic spirit. All protestant nonconformists, *except Unitarians\**, are now protected by law in the open profession of their religious principles; and the exercise of religious worship. And there is great reason to hope; from the wisdom and the liberality of the legislature, that this singular exception will not continue long. Even the catholics are protected, as they ought to be, in the free exercise of their religious worship. And the performance of the official duties of the catholic priesthood, which, half a century ago, was a capital offence, is now, wisely and justly, authorised by the law of the land†. And even those who are most pointedly hostile to the catholic claims, are studiously solicitous to make known their wish, that if any legal restriction yet remains upon the most open and

in London and its vicinity, W. Smith, esq. M. P. in the chair.

\* Unitarians are still liable to the terrible penalties of the Blasphemy Act, 9 and 10 William III, in common with deists, atheists, and apostates.—*Blackstone's Comm.* b. iv, c. 4.

† By a statute, 27 Eliz., any popish priest, born in the dominions of the crown of England; who shall come from be-

public profession of their principles and exercise of their worship, they would be the first to solicit their repeal \*. How different a spirit this from that which operated a century ago, when statute after statute was enacted against the catholics, each more grievous than the preceding, till, in the end, every person professing the catholic religion, was treated as an outlaw and outcast from his native country! † Let us not say that former times were better than these. Much has been done in this eminently tolerating reign, and under the mild administration of George the Third, to break the yoke of religious intolerance. And not only has our venerable monarch amply redeemed the pledge which he gave at the commencement of his reign, to “maintain the toleration inviolable,” a declaration which was received by the nation at large with an enthusiastic rapture, which some of us, even now, remember with delight; but he has far exceeded his promise, and has extended the limits of religious freedom, both yond sea, and shall stay three days in England, without conforming and taking the oaths, is guilty of high treason; and all persons harbouring him are guilty of felony without benefit of clergy. This and other cruel statutes are repealed, by Stat. 18, George III, to all who take the prescribed oaths.—*Blackstone's Comm.* b. iv, c. 4.

\* See the resolutions of the Protestant Union, at the Crown and Anchor, signed by Granville Sharpe, esq.

† See Sir Henry Parnell's History of the Penal Laws against the Irish Catholics.

to protestant and catholic dissenters, to a degree almost unknown in the history of civilized Europe.

Still, however, the state of religious liberty in this country is very far from perfection. For, as one step in the progress of science leads on to another, and as one philosophical discovery opens the way to many others, and the prospect extends as we advance, so, likewise, one step in the improvement of political science and the art of government leads on to another, till, by a gradual, but continually accelerated pace, universal amelioration advances to its greatest perfection.

At the commencement of the present reign, had it been foretold, that religious liberty would advance so far before its close, that the word *toleration* itself would fall into disrepute, and the right of every individual, whether catholic or protestant, to avow and teach his religious principles, and to worship God in the manner which his own conscience prescribes, would be almost universally allowed, and peaceably, and even legally acknowledged and exercised, it would have been thought incredible, and impossible: and the man who should have ventured to utter the prediction, would have been regarded as an enthusiast or a visionary. But now, that the event has actually taken place, it does not ap-

pear in the least degree wonderful. And, instead of being satisfied with what has been already obtained, we are eagerly looking forward to something more and better. Forgetting the things which are behind, we reach forth to those that are before — and very justly. For we have no more reason than our ancestors had to believe, that we have reached the summit of perfection. It is natural for man to pant after improvement. And the march of knowledge and truth, and with it the progress of liberty, of virtue, and of human happiness, is uninterrupted and irresistible. Nothing can stop or retard its course. It will force its way, in spite of every obstacle which it may encounter from ignorance, prejudice, self-interest, pride, and folly. The owls and the bats, who thrive in darkness, and who hate the light, may blink and scream, and show every mark of antipathy and terror, but they must fly to their holes and caverns; for, regardless of their feeble opposition, the splendid luminary will continue his career, and shine more and more unto the perfect day. The progress of improvement, intellectual and moral, individual and national, is like the flowing tide. A wave advances beyond the rest, and it falls back again; you would suppose that the sea was retreating; but the next wave pushes further still; and the succeeding one goes be-

yond that : so that, by a gradual, and, for some time, imperceptible, but sure and irresistible progress, the mighty element bears down every obstruction, and, in due time, occupies its destined station. Even before the inadvertent spectator is aware, the soil and slime, and all unsightly and rugged objects, disappear, and the whole space is occupied by the beautiful and majestic main. Such, no doubt, will be the uncontrollable progress of amelioration, under the divine government, till that auspicious æra shall arrive, marked in resplendent characters in the decrees of Heaven, and to which the golden index of prophecy continually points, when the “knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the seas,” and the reign of truth, freedom, virtue, and happiness, shall be universal and everlasting.

This is, indeed, an animating and a glorious prospect. It is, however, at present, at a great distance. But it is pleasant to know, that such a happy state of things is in the contemplation and purpose of the Almighty. It is still more pleasant, to see that the grand æra is already begun, and that the improvement of mankind is advancing with no lingering step. Those of us who can take a retrospect of fifty years, can bear testimony to the important fact : and should be utterly unworthy of the privileges with which we have been favoured, if we were

not thankful to that indulgent Providence, which has cast our lot in such a wonderful and eventful period. And those who, fifty years hence, will be able to take a similar retrospect, will no doubt see still greater reason for gratitude and admiration.

But the most delightful circumstance of all is, to be actively and successfully engaged in co-operating to the accomplishment of this magnificent design. We are, my friends, all in our respective stations, workers together with God : and the enlightened and religious philosopher will rejoice in the persuasion, that the evil, as well as the good, are, though unintentionally, fulfilling the purposes of an all-wise Providence. But to be conscious that it has ever been the object of our highest and best ambition, and, of our most earnest, strenuous, and persevering exertion, to concur and co-operate in the divine plan, is, indeed, a source of pure, exquisite, and unalloyed satisfaction, of joy unspeakable, and full of glory. Nor is this satisfaction abated, even though we may have been apparently disappointed in every undertaking, and can discover little or no fruit accruing from our honourable and benevolent, however humble exertions. The willing mind is all that God requires. It is the heart alone to which the eye of Omniscience is directed ; and in proportion to the benevolent exertion, will be

the eventual reward. As to success, it is comparatively nothing. Omnipotent benignity will not, cannot, for a moment, be destitute of instruments abundantly competent to carry on its own cause, in its own way, and to complete all in its own time. And every one who is zealous in the service, will be favoured with that proportion of success which the general good requires. And more than this ought not to be desired.

And yet, if the benevolent, active lover of mankind, all whose thoughts and affections, all whose aims, and purposes, and exertions, are set upon doing good, reviewing the course, and effect of his labours, at the close of his career, should see reason to believe, that his faithful exertions, however humble, have been owned and honoured, so as to have been instrumental, though in a small degree, in promoting the great cause which lies nearest to his heart: the delight which would arise from this conviction, is the sublimest, and the most exquisite, which a reasonable and moral agent can enjoy. It overrules all the pains and sufferings which arise from fatigue, danger, poverty, contempt, and persecution. None of these things move him. His happiness is such as the world knoweth not of. It is the happiness of heaven. It is, with reverence I speak it, in its degree, the happiness of God himself. For we can form no conception of divine felicity, more rational or more exalted than

this, that it arises from thoughts, and purposes, and acts of benevolence, from a fixed, immutable resolve to make his creatures happy; and from a certain knowledge, that, in due season, his omnipotent will shall be accomplished in all its infinite extent and grandeur.

But to return to the subject from which we have digressed. The state of religious liberty in this country, and it may be added in the world at large, though far better than it was fifty years ago, and still improving, is nevertheless very distant from perfection. And there is a case, which, even now, engages and almost engrosses, the public attention, in which this great and important principle is most deeply interested. I mean that of the *Catholic Claims*: which the Commons of the United Kingdom, have, with great wisdom and liberality, agreed to take into their most serious consideration. And as the avowed object of that national solemnity, which is the occasion of our present meeting, is to promote national reformation, it cannot be deemed foreign to the purpose of the institution to offer a brief abstract of the arguments in favour of a measure, which, if it should succeed, will, I am persuaded, tend, most directly and powerfully, to improve the national character, and to establish and enlarge the national resources, by discountenancing and discouraging that worst of



passions, religious bigotry, jealousy, and animosity; and by promoting a spirit of loyalty, of liberty, and of fraternal concord and union.

It is, indeed, maintained by some, that the catholics *have no ground of complaint*; that, in the free exercise of their religion, they are protected by law; and that no restrictions are laid upon them, but what are necessary for the safety of the government and the country.

It is allowed, to the credit of the age, that all penal severities, against the catholic persuasion, are blotted out of the statute book. The catholic may now profess his religion, and worship the God of his fathers, in the way that his forefathers worshipped, without being exposed to fine or imprisonment: and the ministers of religion may officiate at the altar, without being liable to the punishment of death. But it does not therefore follow, that they do not suffer, even yet, a very considerable degree of persecution.

Persecution is of two kinds, positive and negative: it is the infliction of pains and penalties, or the withholding of rights. From the former, the catholic and the protestant nonconformists, with the *single exception of the Unitarians*, are happily exempted. But under the latter, they suffer many, not trifling nor imaginary, but real and grievous wrongs.

The English catholic, be his property ever so great, his character ever so respectable, his

loyalty or his patriotism ever so unimpeachable, is, by law, peremptorily excluded from all offices in cities and corporations, from a seat in either house of parliament, from voting at elections for representatives, and from all offices, civil and military.

In Ireland, where the pale of catholic toleration is more extended than in Great Britain, the remaining disabilities, though fewer in number, are, if possible, still more galling and offensive. A catholic, in that island, is allowed to pursue the professions of law and of arms. In these professions, he is permitted to rise to a certain rank, and there he stops. Whatever be his talents, whatever his merit, whatever his past exertions, whatever his loyalty and attachment to the constitution, if he is the only person at the bar, or in the field, who is qualified to fill the vacant post, if his commander-in-chief, if the counsellors and advisers of the crown, if the sovereign himself, be ever so desirous of advancing him to a superior post, if it be the unanimous, concurrent wish of the people, it is all in vain. The door is closed upon all the pursuits of honourable ambition, upon all the honours and rewards due to superior merit, upon all the benefits which his country might derive from his transcendant abilities. It is shut, and none can open. In contradiction to the judgment, and in opposition to the united wishes, and the most evident

interest of the monarch and the nation, the proscribed catholic, even though he were a Marlborough, a Nelson, a Chatham, or a Fox, must be superseded, and must make up his mind to stand by and to see others, his juniors in age and experience, his inferiors in every talent and qualification for office, put over his head, and to retire from the service of an applauding country, to which it was the favourite wish of his heart, and the main object of his honest ambition, to have devoted his best and maturest powers, in the prime and vigour of his days, when he is most capable of splendid, useful exertion, he is compelled to retire, with a sorrowing and indignant spirit, to solitude, to inactivity, and obscurity\*.

\* That this is not mere imaginary supposition will appear from the following extract, from a speech from colonel O'Shea, addressed to the chairman of the catholic meeting, of the county of Dublin, held at Kilmainham, in the year 1811: "Having made, in the Austrian army, the campaigns against the common enemy, I found myself, at the late unfortunate struggle at Wagram, a colonel, commanding a regiment of three thousand men. A rank I still retain, with the advantage of being able to resume my military station, should Austria again make common cause against the despotism of France. And there, every employment, even the command of the army, is open to me, catholic or protestant. And such is our national reputation, that the archduke Charles said to me, 'Never was the army of Austria better officered than when possessing so many Irish,' of whom, at one time, upwards of thirty were generals. How different my situation at home! Although of the oldest and most respectable families in the country, possessing fortune to back

And is not this persecution? persecution of the most mortifying and insulting kind? to a generous mind more insupportable than fine or imprisonment, than torture, or even death itself, to have a public mark of degradation fixed upon him, in the face of his country and the world? and to have the cup of honourable remuneration dashed out of his hands, at the very moment when it is applied to his lips?

And what is the crime which the catholic has committed, to be thus treated as an outcast in his native land? to be denied the rights and privileges of a free-born citizen? The only reason which has been assigned—the only one which can be assigned—is this, that *he professes the religion of his forefathers*: of those brave Englishmen, who, while they acknowledged a spi-

it, let my acquirements and talents be what they will, I am curbed in my pursuit. No confidence is to be placed in me, no command is to be entrusted to me, *because I am a catholic.*”—See *Edinburgh Review*, Nov. 1812.

This grievance is, indeed, so intolerable, that the Speaker of the House of Commons, in his eloquent speech, on Tuesday, 9th of March, against the catholic claims, acknowledged, that this is a case which requires immediate redress. He was justly reminded by Mr. Ponsonby, that, for this very doctrine, six years ago, the whig administration were dismissed; and Mr. Ponsonby shrewdly observed, that it “would have been happy for the country, if the university of Oxford, which at that time set up the cry of, ‘No Popery,’ had then possessed so enlightened and able a representative.” This shows, however, the progress of liberal opinions, in the short compass of six years.

ritual subjection to the see of Rome, at the same time, firmly and successfully resisted the arrogant encroachments of the papal power\*; and who wrested, from a capricious and insolent tyrant, on the plains of Runnymede, the Magna Charta of British liberty. These are the men who are denied the enjoyment of those privileges for which their high-spirited ancestors fought and bled.

But what is it that these catholics desire? Is it the *possession of political power*? No.—And it requires no little exertion of Christian charity to believe, that the consciences of many who bring the accusation, do not belie the charge they make. No, it is not the actual possession

\* After the base conduct of John, in resigning his crown to the pope, the legislature, indignant at the meanness of the monarch, in the reign of his wise and valiant son and successor, Edward the First, enacted several statutes in opposition to the exorbitant claims of the court of Rome, which statutes were confirmed, and others to the same purpose were enacted in the reign of Edward the Third. But the famous statute of *præmunire*, which is the foundation of all other statutes against exorbitant ecclesiastical claims, was passed in the 16th year of Richard the Second. This statute confiscates the property, attaches the person, and puts out of the king's protection every one who procures, at Rome or elsewhere, any translations, excommunications, bulles, &c. The men who made these laws were catholics. "The writ of *præmunire*," says Blackstone, "took its original from the exorbitant power claimed and exercised in England by the pope, which, even in the days of blind zeal, was too heavy for our ancestors to bear."—*Blackstone's Comm.* b. iv, c. 8.

of power which the catholics solicit. If all they ask were to be granted to them to-morrow, the addition made to the political power of the catholics would be but as a drop from the ocean, or as the dust of the balance. They would neither be judges, nor generals, nor representatives of the people. What the catholics implore is, that they may not lie under a public proscription; that they may not without a crime, either proved or alledged, be degraded from the rank of citizens of a free country: that they may be permitted, when their sovereign approves, and when their country invites, but not otherwise, to devote their lives, their fortunes, their talents, and their influence, to the service of their country, to the defence of its constitution, its rights, its laws, and liberties, and to the advancement of its prosperity, whether in the senate, at the bar, on the bench, or in the field. Is this an unreasonable request? Can these solicitations continue to be urged in vain? Will the country always turn a deaf ear to the claims of some of its best, its bravest, and most loyal citizens? It cannot be. Surely, it cannot be.

But let us now inquire what objection can possibly be alledged against granting a request which it might have been believed and expected, would, to every humane and considerate mind,

to every man who possesses the heart of a Briton, or the principles of a Christain, appear self-evidently reasonable and just.

First, it is alledged that the catholics cannot give *sufficient security* for their loyalty to the crown, and their fidelity to the constitution.

Sufficient security! What security can be asked or given, or even conceived greater or more satisfactory, than that which may be collected from the uniform, undeviating tenor of conduct, whether of individuals or of societies? And have not the catholics, for the last century, and especially for the last fifty years, notwithstanding all their persecutions, their disqualifications, their degradations, and even the insults which they have experienced, notwithstanding the rejection, time after time, of their humble and reasonable petitions to the legislature and to the crown, notwithstanding all their bitter disappointments in the violation of promises which they understood to have been made, and of compacts, which they conceived to have been formed\*,

\* Whatever promises were made or understood to be made by those who negotiated the important measure of the Union, and how mortifying soever the disappointment of the catholics, it is a pleasure to reflect that the character of the sovereign was in no respect implicated. NO ROYAL PROMISE WAS VIOLATED. Of this, the following anecdote, if authentic, as it is said to be, contains ample proof. During the negociation, Mr. secretary Dundas, afterwards lord Melville, submitted to his majesty a draught of the proposed articles of Union to learn the royal pleasure, and to take his majesty's commands upon

and in consequence of which their support was given to that great and salutary, but unpopular measure, the Union of the sister kingdoms, have they not, in all these circumstances, and under all these provocations, approved themselves the most faithful and dutiful subjects of the crown? Have they not been ready, in circumstances the most trying, to exert themselves to the very utmost that the law allowed, to manifest their attachment to the constitution, and to oppose the attacks of foreign invaders, and the perils of domestic treason? \* Has not their perse-

the subject. The monarch, upon this occasion, is reported to have said, "I hope, Mr. Dundas, I am not pledged to extend the privileges of the catholics."—"Your majesty," replied the right honourable secretary, "is pledged to nothing: but your majesty's ministers flatter themselves that the clauses relating to the catholics will be interpreted liberally."—"But, Mr. Dundas, you recollect the coronation oath."—"I do recollect it, sire," replies the secretary, "but your majesty will have the goodness to consider, that there is nothing in that oath which can bind your majesty from concurring in any measure which the wisdom of parliament may recommend."—"None of your Scotch metaphysics for me, Mr. Dundas," interrupted the monarch, with some warmth; "I do not approve of your Scotch metaphysics:" and immediately broke up the conference. Who would not wish, that a mind so honourable had been more enlightened, even though it should have been through the medium of Mr. Dundas's Scotch metaphysics?

† "In the year 1795, lord Petre raised a corps of two hundred and fifty men, for his majesty's service, equipped and trained at his own expense. He requested that his son might be appointed to command it. This was refused, on



vering loyalty been almost in proportion to the oppressions which they have endured? Have not their political virtues run parallel with their political injuries? so that the lively expression of the poet is almost literally applicable to the loyalty of the catholics:—

“The beaten spaniel’s fondness not so strange.”

And are we now to be told, that the catholics can give no security for their allegiance? that they will become disloyal, seditious, and turbulent, when their just claims are allowed? and that they will renounce their attachment to the constitution, just at the time when they are admitted to a full share in its blessings?

But it is alledged, that the priest can *absolve the catholic from his oath of allegiance*: and that it is an avowed principle of the Roman church, that faith is not to be kept with heretics.

This imputation, the catholics unanimously and indignantly disavow. The question was formally and officially proposed, some years ago, to six of the most celebrated catholic universities upon the continent, previously to the repeal of the penal statutes then in force, and received a complete and satisfactory an-

account of his religion. Another officer was appointed to the command; and lord Petre delivered over the corps, completely equipped, and completely trained, into the hands of government, and his son served in the ranks!”—See *An Address to Protestants*, by Charles Butler, *esq.*, p. 3.

swer \*. And the catholics firmly and justly appeal to the uniform tenor of their conduct in private life, as well as to all their public engagements, to show that no description of citizens, no denomination of religionists, let their profession be what it may, adhere more faithfully and religiously to all their engagements, public and private, than those of the catholic persuasion. And if catholics are not bound by their oaths, what is there to hinder them from taking seats in either house of parliament, or what disqualifies them from aspiring to the highest offices, civil or military?

The appeal, however, is made to *fact*. Catholics have violated their faith with those whom they called heretics, in the case of the emperor Sigismond and the Bohemian reformers †, in the bloody massacre of St. Bartholomew, and in the revocation of the famous edict of Nantes.

The catholics, nevertheless, though the facts

\* An Abstract of the Answers of the Six Foreign Universities, 1788, may be found in the Supplementary Appendix to Sir John Cox Hippisley's Speech on the Catholic Question, No. VII. The originals are in the possession of Charles Butler, esq., and open to inspection.—*Address to Protestants*, p. 13.

† The very word of the Safe-conduct of the emperor Sigismond to John Huss, are, "Omni prorsus impedimento remoto, transire, stase, morari, et REDIRE, libere permittatis sibi que et suis." Pope John XXIII. also added his Safe-conduct.—*Gilpin's Life of Huss*, p. 188—193.

are undeniable, most strenuously maintain, that the infamous tyrants who violated their imperial or royal word are not justified in their treachery by the catholic doctrine, even though their disgraceful proceedings were sanctioned by popes or councils. They regard this shameful conduct with as much indignation and horror as the protestants themselves: and would be as far from imitating it in similar circumstances. Nor is it just to impute to children the iniquities of the fathers, nor to charge upon a body of men, or upon the principles which they profess, the crimes of individuals, however distinguished.

What, for example, was the conduct of Charles the Second to the presbyterians, who restored him with unrestricted prerogatives to the throne of his ancestors? What was the return made by the nation to the zealous non-conformists, who, with confiding simplicity, supported a Bill by which they were themselves excluded from offices and honours, in order to keep out the catholics, under a promise, expressed or understood, that they should speedily be restored to their political rights? \* And

\* The parliament which enacted the Test Act, the sole object of which was, the exclusion of the catholics, and the title of which is, "An Act for preventing Dangers which may happen from Popish Recusants," was desirous to release the protestant Dissenters from its operation, but was prevented by the king, who was exasperated at the conduct of the Dissenters, and who first prorogued and then dissolved the parliament, at the time when a bill for the re-

where was the gratitude of the established church, after it had, by the aid of the non-conformists, which it had implored in the hour of danger, compelled a catholic tyrant to abdicate the throne? But shall we then say that it is a doctrine of the church of England, that faith is not to be kept with nonconformists? God forbid. Let every one bear his own burden. Let every one suffer the disgrace of his violated honour. But let not the innocent be confounded with the guilty: nor the honourable members of either the catholic or the protestant churches bear the opprobrium of proceedings, which they peremptorily disavow, and which they would neither imitate nor approve.

It is further urged, that the catholic acknowledges *subjection to a foreign jurisdiction*; and that the pope is at this instant in the power of the worst and most malignant enemy of the United Kingdom.

The objection is plausible. But, in my estimation, greater stress has been laid upon it than it will reasonably bear. We are again and again assured, by the catholics, that the deference which the catholic owes to the holy father is purely spiritual. That he acknowledges no power in the pope to absolve him from oaths of allegiance, or to loosen the bonds of civil obligation. Nor

lief of the Dissenters was in the last stage of its progress through both houses. — See *Furneaux's Letters to Blackstone*, lett. vi.

does the bishop of Rome himself pretend to it. A wise administration, disposed to conciliation, would soon discover some method of settling this difficulty consistently with the religious principles of the honest catholic. Nor will the catholic ask, nor will a prudent government admit of any intercourse with a foreign potentate but what shall be public and avowed.

Secondly, it is objected, that if these claims are conceded to the catholics, *they cannot be withheld from the protestant nonconformist.*

And in the eye of reason, of equity, and of Christian liberality, the argument is conclusive, and the consequence undeniable. Whatever reason there may be to elevate the catholic to the rank and privileges of a freeborn Briton, there is at least equal reason to grant the same privilege to the protestant nonconformist, while his conduct is loyal, dutiful, and peaceable: not to mention the circumstance, upon which indeed I lay but little stress, that he has no intercourse with a foreign hierarchy. And the time will come when the justice, which, for want of better information and more comprehensive views, is now denied, will be granted with cheerfulness, and all will see, that it is for the interest and prosperity, both of the community and of individuals, that no civil distinctions should be allowed, no political disabilities imposed upon account of differences in religious

opinions. Test laws never existed in one large district of the United Kingdom, and they have for many years been abolished in another, yet no inconvenience whatever has resulted from it, but the contrary. And, from the accelerated progress of intellectual and moral improvement, we hope, at no very great distance of time, to hail the day when the whole religious penal code shall, at once and for ever, be erased from the statute book, which it has so long disfigured and disgraced, and be cast into the gulf of oblivion, as a mill-stone into the sea, to rise no more.

In the mean time, though the liberation of the protestant nonconformists follows directly and irresistibly, in reason, in justice, in liberality, and in true policy, from granting the catholic claims, it does not necessarily follow in *fact*. For who will presume to say, that the government of this country hath not a power to grant the catholic claims, while it withholds those of the protestant nonconformist? Or what power on earth can compel the parliament of the United Empire to advance one step further in the progress of amelioration than it shall itself, in its own discretion, judge to be expedient. We desire, and we expect, in due time, complete emancipation from all religious restrictions and legal disabilities. But we desire it in the use of legal methods: and we expect it from the growing wisdom and moderation of our country-

men. From the hand of "sedition, of privy conspiracy, and rebellion," we would disdain to accept the boon. Our holy cause needeth not, and forbids the use of any other weapons than those of sound reason and liberal policy.

Thirdly, it is further alledged, that, if the catholics succeed, the *existing establishment will be endangered*: for that the catholics are from principle *persecutors*, and that they would feel it as a duty to exert themselves to the utmost to destroy the national church, and to establish the catholic religion in its room.

Some persons talk as if they believed, that if the catholic claims were granted, and the catholics made eligible to public offices, every place in the army, in the senate, in the courts of law and justice, and even the throne itself, would speedily be filled with them: and that, like the frogs in Egypt, they would penetrate into the cabinet, and swarm in the palaces and the bed-chambers of Pharoah. And their haunted imaginations immediately see Smithfield in a blaze, and pastors and bishops chained to the stake.

The truth is, that if the prayer of the catholic petition were to be granted to the utmost extent, the only perceptible consequence would be, that certain disabilities and disqualifications would be removed, and a public stigma would be taken off from a respectable body of men, who had done nothing to forfeit their political

birthright. But, as I have before observed, the accession of real power would be trivial and indiscernible, and the wheels of government would move on in the same track, and with the same regularity, as before? Is any Englishman so faint-hearted as to apprehend, that two hundred thousand catholics\*, though every one of them should be possessed with the malignity of a Gardiner, and the fury of a Bonner, could wrest the reins of government out of the hands of ten millions of protestants, and again deluge the island with blood? And even in Ireland, where the proportion of catholics is far more considerable, their political power would not be sensibly increased.

But, for argument's sake, let it be admitted, that the catholics may become possessed of the powers of government. Let us, by an effort of imagination, figure to ourselves, that such is the great and universally acknowledged preeminence of catholic talent and catholic merit, that a protestant sovereign shall admit none but catholics into his cabinet, and that a protestant people shall send none but catholic representatives to parliament, does it follow, that, in the present age, catholics would persecute because their ancestors did?

That catholics were once persecutors, cruel, sanguinary persecutors of the reformed church,

\* The supposed number of catholics in England.



is too surely attested by the flames of Smithfield, by the wars of the Low Countries, by the massacre of Paris, by the revocation of the edict of Nantes, and, most of all, by the inhuman, infernal tribunal of the Inquisition.

But are protestants themselves clear in this matter? Is there any sect among them, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, Calvinists, Arminians, Socinians, nay, even Quakers themselves, the most peaceful, the most innocent of all sects, which, if it were arraigned at the bar of strict, impartial justice, could confidently appeal to history, and plead, Not guilty?

I grant, with pleasure, that the annals of protestant persecution are not so deeply stained with blood as those of the catholic church. And I lament to see that there are some among us, who, not making sufficient allowance for the ignorance and barbarous spirit of the times, and the imperfection of human nature, are busied in dragging forth some of the most eminent of the reformers, and holding them up to public infamy for acts of violence, which all now agree to condemn, but which, in an age just emerging from the grossest intellectual and moral darkness, were generally approved. I lament to see those Christian heroes, to whose stupendous efforts we are indebted for all the light and liberty we now enjoy, the revered names of Soci-

nus and Calvin, of Melancthon and Beza, of Ridley and of Cranmer, the venerable, the pious, the mild, and gentle Cranmer, whom to injure was to secure his friendship, and whose frailties and infirmities were surely expiated by his heroic martyrdom; to see these names degraded to a level with a Gardiner, a Bonner, and other infernal fiends, who thirsted for human blood, and whose memories are devoted to the execration of mankind.

But the season of darkness is past. And I am persuaded that the catholic of modern times looks back with as much horror and detestation to those scenes of blood as the protestant, and would be equally unwilling to repeat them. They were the transactions of an ignorant and ferocious age, never more to return. And the catholics of this country having themselves been sufferers for more than a century under the iron rod of persecution, they know the heart of a stranger, they see and feel the injustice and cruelty of inflicting pains and penalties for the sake of conscience, and are no doubt radically cured of a persecuting spirit.

And that the spirit of intolerance is greatly on the decline, if not altogether banished from the catholic communion, is evident, not merely from the professions of those who are destitute of political power, and suffering under civil privations, but from the practice of governments in those

countries where the catholic religion is triumphant. In no nation of Europe are princes restrained by law from availing themselves of the talents and services of protestants, in any department of state, civil or military. In Hungary, in Prussia, and through the empire of France, catholics and protestants are upon an equal footing, and even in Spain the Inquisition is abolished.

Finally, it is alledged that all nonconformists, catholic and protestant, must be from principle, and in their hearts, *hostile* to the established religion, and from interest desirous to pull it down, and to build up their own communion upon its ruins. The prosperity, therefore, and even the safety of the established church, requires that they should be deprived of political power.

This is a very plausible and most imposing argument: and with many it has more weight than all the rest. But I hesitate not to assert, that it is an argument which will not bear examination, that it is a gross and dangerous paralogism, and that to act upon it is really to bring the established religion into that very crisis, which it is so desirable to avoid.

The settlement of ample revenues, and the investment of the ministers of an establishment with high rank and dignity, is amply sufficient for the support of a national religion. And the church of England, protected by the laws, the

customs; the opulence; and the fashion of the country, needs not, for her own security, to grasp at the monopoly of political power. She may be well content to share it in due proportion with the rest of the community.

This, she may be assured, is the decided judgement of all who are not within the pale of her communion: and who see no reason why they should be laid under the bar of a political proscription. And it may behove churchmen to recollect, that these are in number more than half of the population of the United Empire.

The safety of the established communion depends, in a considerable degree, upon the division of the nonconformist interest. No sect, single-handed, is equal to cope with the national church, though all united might, if that were their object, accomplish her downfall.

But so discordant are they in principle, and so hostile to each other in doctrine and in spirit, that nothing can possibly unite them; nothing can induce them to act in concert, but some great, common, and oppressive grievance. Such is the universal denial of their proper share of political influence; laying the whole body indiscriminately under one general sentence of degradation and disgrace.

Remove this single impediment, efface this general stigma, grant the nonconformists their

birthright, as the natives of a free country, their eligibility to political office and power, and the bond of union is burst asunder. A mutual repulsion immediately takes place. And the mass, which, in a state of compression and confinement, threatened an explosion which might endanger the constitution both of church and state, when thus set at liberty, evaporates into air, and becomes perfectly impotent and harmless.

Had revolutionary France been left to herself, she would have been torn to pieces by contending factions, and France would for many years have been blotted out of the map of Europe. But the impolitic combination of the surrounding states to crush the nascent republic, compelled the contending parties to suspend their domestic broils, and to concentrate their united force to resist in mass the common enemy. The sad consequences of this compulsory union are deeply felt by prostrate Europe to the present hour: and will be recollected with horror for centuries to come.

Let England take the salutary warning. If I were a member of the established communion, zealous for its security, its dignity, and its prosperity, most adverse to the increase of the non-conformist interest, and apprehensive of the numbers, the influence, the zeal, and the activity of the sectaries, I would say, give the nonconformists, both catholic and protestant, all they ask. Let them have no common grievance, no

general bond of union. Then you may bid defiance to every attempt to shake the established church. For if one sect seeks your ruin, twenty will for that very reason court your alliance, and proffer their support. By division, you will reign secure.

Thus every party will be pleased and satisfied. All just complaint will be removed. The established church will be safe. The nonconformists will enjoy their political rights. And the government of the country will have the power to select from all classes of its subjects, without distinction, those to whom it may best confide the safety and the prosperity of the empire. Religious animosity, that bane of national happiness, will cease. Every species, and every form of persecution, will be abolished. Theological discussion will be conducted with good temper and decorum. The spirit of the Christian religion will prevail as the knowledge of its genuine principles becomes more extended. And, under the blessing of Divine Providence, which measures so wise, liberal, and salutary, are calculated to secure, the United Empire will tower above its surrounding and less fortunate neighbours, will continue to bid a proud defiance to its envious and malignant enemies, and will stand gloriously preeminent in knowledge, in freedom, in virtue, and in happiness.

## APPENDIX.

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### Nº I.

CHARLES BUTLER, Esq., in his late Address to the Protestants of Great Britain and Ireland, sect. xiv, has given the following admirable summary of the articles in which all Christians are agreed.

“ 1. That there is ONE GOD. 2. That he is a Being of infinite perfection. 3. That he directs all things by his providence. 4. That it is our duty to love God with all our hearts. 5. That it is our duty to repent of our sins. 6. That God pardons the truly penitent. 7. That there is a future state of rewards and punishments, where all mankind shall be judged according to their works. 8. That God sent his Son into the world, to be its saviour, the author of eternal salvation to all that obey him. 9. That he is the true Messiah. 10. That he worked miracles, suffered, died, and rose again, as is related in the four gospels. 11. That he will hereafter make a second appearance on the earth, raise all mankind from the dead, judge the world in righteousness, bestow eternal life on the virtuous, and punish the workers of iniquity.”

To this truly catholic and apostolic creed, this creed of the universal church, *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*, the author of the discourse most readily declares

## APPENDIX.

his unfeigned and unequivocal assent and consent. In his estimation, it contains pure Christianity, the whole of pure Christianity, and nothing but pure Christianity. It is a doctrine most worthy of God to communicate, and most important for man to receive. In comparison with these momentous truths, what are all those curious speculations upon which Christians in all ages have differed! and for which theologues have wrangled, bigots have persecuted, and martyrs have suffered? They are the wood, the stubble, and the rubbish, which having been erected upon this foundation of gold and gems, must all perish in the day when every man's work will be tried with fire.

The respectable author of the address expresses his hope of a re-union of the catholic and protestant churches, when they will allow themselves calmly to revise, and clearly to express the tenets on which they differ. The author of the discourse likewise, but in a different way, entertains no doubtful expectation, that the time will come when theological differences will cease. He believes, that, as knowledge of all kinds, physical and moral, advances, and as freedom of enquiry and discussion are encouraged, all the additions of human ignorance to the pure doctrine of Christ will by degrees be detected and discarded. And, in the mean time, it surely becomes those who agree in the essential and infinitely important points stated above, to differ on other subjects with meekness and charity, and to allow to all the free exercise of that unalienable right of private judgement which every one justly claims for himself.



## APPENDIX.

### Nº II.

*The Oath and Declaration prescribed by the British Parliament of the 31st of his present Majesty, and which is taken by all English Catholics.*

“ I *A. B.* do hereby declare, That I do profess the  
“ Roman Catholic Religion.

“ I *A. B.* do sincerely promise and swear, That I will  
“ be faithful, and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty  
“ King George the Third, and him will defend to the  
“ utmost of my power against all conspiracies and at-  
“ tempts whatsoever that shall be made against his Person,  
“ Crown, or Dignity: And I will do my utmost endea-  
“ vour to disclose and make known to His Majesty, his  
“ Heirs and Successors, all Treasons and Traiterous Con-  
“ spiracies, which may be formed against him or them:  
“ And I do faithfully promise to maintain, support, and  
“ defend, to the utmost of my power, the Succession of  
“ the crown; which Succession, by an Act, intituled, ‘An  
“ Act for the further Limitation of the Crown, and better  
“ securing the Rights and Liberties of the Subject,’ is,  
“ and stands limited to the Princess Sophia; Electress and  
“ Duchess Dowager of Hanover, and the Heirs of her  
“ Body, being Protestants; hereby utterly renouncing and  
“ abjuring any obedience or allegiance unto any other  
“ person claiming or pretending a right to the Crown of  
“ these Realms. And I do swear, That I do reject and  
“ detest as an unchristian and impious position, that it  
“ is lawful to Murder or Destroy any person or persons  
“ whatsoever, for, or under pretence of, their being He-  
“ retics or Infidels; and also that unchristian and im-

## APPENDIX.

“ pious Principle, that faith is not to be kept with Here-  
“ tics or Infidels: And I further declare, that it is not an  
“ Article of my Faith; and that I do renounce, reject,  
“ and abjure the Opinion, that Princes excommunicated  
“ by the Pope and Council, or any authority of the See  
“ of Rome, or by any authority whatsoever, may be de-  
“ posed or murdered by their Subjects or any person  
“ whatsoever: And I do promise, that I will not hold,  
“ maintain, or abet any such Opinion, or any other Opi-  
“ nions contrary to what is expressed in this Declaration:  
“ And I do declare, that I do not believe that the Pope  
“ of Rome, or any other foreign Prince, Prelate, State,  
“ or Potentate, hath, or ought to have, any temporal or  
“ civil jurisdiction, power, superiority, or pre-eminence,  
“ directly or indirectly, within this realm: And I do so-  
“ lemnly, in the presence of God, profess, testify, and  
“ declare, that I do make this Declaration, and every  
“ part thereof, in the plain and ordinary sense of the  
“ words of this Oath, without any Evasion, Equivoca-  
“ tion, or Mental Reservation whatever, and without any  
“ dispensation already granted by the Pope, or any au-  
“ thority of the See of Rome, or any person whatever,  
“ and without thinking that I am, or can be, acquitted  
“ before God or man, or absolved of this Declaration, or  
“ any part thereof, although the Pope, or any other  
“ person or authority whatsoever, shall dispense with, or  
“ annul the same, or declare that it was null or void. So  
“ help me God.”

## APPENDIX.

*The Oath and Declaration prescribed by the Irish Act of the 33d of His present Majesty, and is taken by all Irish Roman Catholics, wishing to entitle themselves to the benefit of that Act.*

“ I *A. B.* do hereby declare, That I do profess the Roman Catholic Religion.

“ I *A. B.* do swear, That I do abjure, condemn, and detest, as unchristian and impious, the principle that it is lawful to murder, destroy, or any ways injure any persons whatsoever, for or under the pretence of being a Heretic: And I do declare, solemnly before God, that I believe, that no act in itself unjust, immoral, or wicked, can ever be justified or excused, by or under pretence or colour that it was done either for the good of the church, or in obedience to any ecclesiastical power whatsoever: I also declare, that it is not an Article of the Catholic Faith, neither am I thereby required to believe or profess, that the Pope is infallible, or that I am bound to obey any order, in its own nature immoral, though the Pope, or any ecclesiastical power, should issue or direct such order: but, on the contrary, I hold, that it would be sinful in me to pay any respect or obedience thereto: I further declare, that I do not believe, that any sin whatever committed by me, can be forgiven, at the mere will of any Pope, or any Priest, or of any person or persons whatsoever, but that sincere sorrow for past sins, a firm and sincere resolution to avoid future guilt, and to atone to God, are previous and indispensable requisites to establish a well-founded expectation of forgiveness, and that any person who receives absolution without these previous requisites, so far from obtaining thereby

#### APPENDIX.

“ any remission of his sins, incurs the additional guilt of  
“ violating a Sacrament : And I do swear, that I will de-  
“ fend, to the uttermost of my power, the Settlement  
“ and Arrangement of Property in this Country, as es-  
“ tablished by the Laws now in being: I do hereby  
“ disclaim, disavow, and solemnly abjure any intention to  
“ subvert the present Church Establishment, for the pur-  
“ pose of substituting a Catholic Establishment in its  
“ stead : And I do solemnly swear, that I will not exercise  
“ any privilege to which I am or may become entitled,  
“ to disturb and weaken the Protestant Religion and Pro-  
“ testant Government in this Kingdom.

“ So help me God.”

These oaths, which the Catholics of the two countries are required to take, were drawn up with the utmost care, by men of consummate abilities and great legal knowledge: no candid person, who reads them with attention, can hesitate to allow that they are completely satisfactory; and that they contain every security consistent with Catholic principle, which the most apprehensive mind could suggest.

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